

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES—

EBB AND FLOW

Ocean, Steeped in Traditions of Seafaring Men and Colonial Days, Is State's Fastest Growing County

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

COUNTY fathers wasted little time naming Ocean County after its separation from Monmouth County on February 18, 1850. Simply and directly they titled their land in appreciation of their dependence on the sea—and if in their hearts some of them also meant to recognize the moody savagery and winsomeness of the surf, so much the better.

There was no casting about to pay tribute to some English nobleman. Too many diversified nationalities had sifted into Ocean by 1850 to make such a name logical. Besides, with a coastline of 50 miles and 150 years of sea-linked memories, why anything but Ocean? All the county's rich past—and hope for the future—went into that name.

Henry Hudson took a look at Ocean County's beachfront in 1609 and, to the eternal delight of county publicists, his ship's log spoke of this being "a very good land to fall in with, and a pleasant land to see." Captain Cornelius Jacobsen Mey, the much-traveled Dutchman, took a much closer look in 1614 and bestowed two names which have partially withstood the anglicizing tides of time—Barendegat ("Inlet of Breakers") and Eyre Haven ("Egg Harbor").

Nomadic fishermen and whalers put in to Barnegat or Egg Harbor bays after Mey and mingled with Indians who frequented the shore looking for sea food. Occasionally a ship flying the Jolly Roger dropped anchor off the coast (to bury treasure, the excitable say). Other ships foundered on the shoals and cast their passengers upon the sands.

MOST of those early arrivals stayed without the formality of buying the land, possibly reflecting that English noblemen had no more right to split up land sight unseen than they had to settle, sight seen. Captain William Tom, English official from Newcastle, Delaware, looked over the land in about 1673 (and for his trouble has had Toms River—creek and town—named after him).

However, Henry Jacobs Falkenburg of Schleswig-Holstein became the first settler of record because he bought 800 acres from the East Jersey Proprietors in 1698 near what is now Tuckerton. At about the same time Mordecai and Edward Andrews, Quaker brothers from Oyster Bay, L. I., bought land nearby. Edward built the first grist mill on the Jersey coast in 1704.

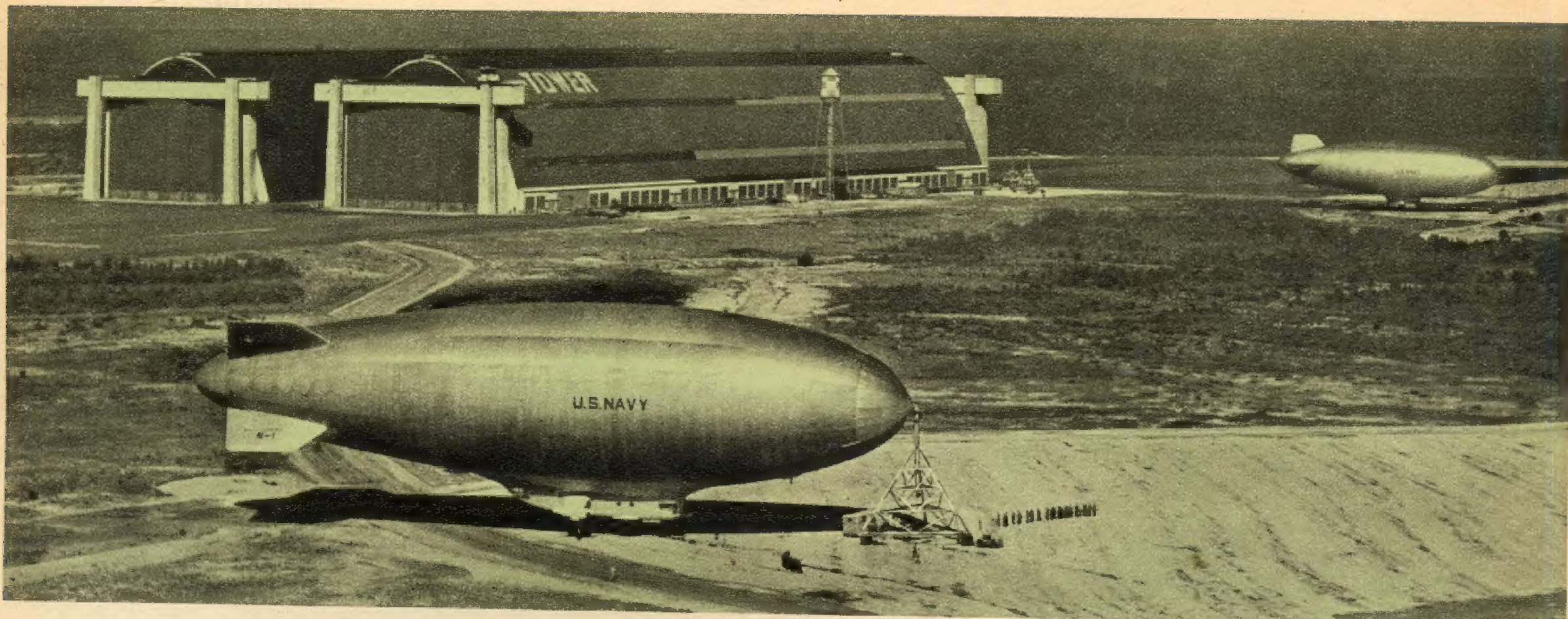
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Historic Barnegat Light, the "grand old champion of the tides."



"Cathedral of the Air," a memorial near Lakehurst Naval Air Base.

This is the fifteenth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Passaic County.



(Official U. S. Navy Photograph)

"Eyes of Fleet" at Navy's lighter-than-air craft base, Lakehurst.

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powering his stones with water from a pond created by South Jersey beavers.

Many others came before 1720, representing varying nationalities and creeds. Most of them wished merely to be left alone, and they were. And, they left others alone. A minister who toured the coast had this to say about Ocean folk in 1750: "Some are decent people, who have lived in better places; but those who were born and bred here have neither religion nor manners * * *". In all fairness, his writings also revealed a rather meager record of conversions, which surely colored his observations.

INDEED, as far as religious intensity is concerned, two Quaker missionaries from Tuckerton—Ann Gauntt and her niece, Ann Willet—attained greater fame than the bitter itinerant preacher as they toured North Atlantic states from 1728 until the Revolution. Moreover, Ocean County gave rise to the Universalist Church in America in 1770 at Good Luck, where Thomas Potter had erected a church in 1766.

Potter waited patiently for a preacher who would reflect his own liberal views of a universal God. Then, in 1770, John Murray, stranded when an English sloop went aground nearby, came to Potter's home seeking food. Murray and Potter talked, learned that each believed in a just and loving God (in a day when most religious leaders looked upon God as stern and harsh). Murray agreed to stay and preach in Potter's church—and the Universalist Church grew from that spot on the barren Jersey coast.

Saw mills dotted the county's numerous creeks before 1760 and dozens of sailing vessels set out into the open sea from Toms River or Tuckerton by 1770. Steady streams of fish-laden wagons left the coast to trundle through the forests across state to Mount Holly and Philadelphia.

THE nature of their occupations and their personal characteristics made these coastwise people willingly undertake war with England or with any one else who threatened their free-

dom. Privateering became a way of life, where the chance of a profit may have helped induce some to undertake risks in the name of patriotism. Toms River and Tuckerton assumed importance after the British blockaded larger ports. Privateers slipped out of Barnegat Bay and Little Egg Harbor to attack the King's shipping, then slipped back in to sell their captured cargoes. Many of the supplies found their way to Philadelphia via the sandy roads through the pine barrens.

Toms River had additional unique Revolutionary importance as the site of salt works established by the Continental Congress and the State of Pennsylvania. Congress spent 6,000 pounds (about \$30,000) to set up its works, while Pennsylvania expended 400 pounds. Many other private works flourished along the coast, since the manufacturer of gunpowder and the flavoring and preservation of food demanded huge quantities of salt.

A windmill pumped salt water from Barnegat Bay to vats at Toms River, where evaporation under the hot sun permitted workers to collect the salt. The British considered the salt manufacturing vital, too, and in 1778 sent an expedition of 135 men to burn the government works at Toms River.

NOT more than 2,000 people lived in Ocean County at the end of the Revolution. Trade revived quickly (if, indeed, it ever stopped). President Washington signed papers making Tuckerton port of entry for 30 miles of coast from Barnegat Inlet south to Brigantine Inlet. Tuckerton's harbor business spurted and its shipbuilders assumed importance. An 1823 visitor reported the harbor full of ships and the place "rich in money," with taverns and boarding houses full and hundreds of men cutting timber for the shipbuilders.

One of Tuckerton's shipbuilding families, the Shrouds, built the "Lo-

rainer," said to be the first brig (or brigantine) ever made. The two-masted, square-rigged vessel won attention as one of the most popular sailing types ever built.

Elsewhere, at Waretown, Toms River, Barnegat and Forked River, shipbuilders pushed forward with their whaleboats, oyster boats and smaller craft for coastwise shipping, leaving the larger vessels to Tuckerton. Ocean County masters sailed the world and the little boy who didn't dream of growing up to follow the sea was rare.

ANOTHER important early facet of the county's economic welfare started modestly in 1789, when David Wright lit the fire in his iron forge near what is now Lakehurst. An extensive works followed at Staffordsville in 1797 and by 1812 other forges hummed near Laurelton (Butcher's Forge), near Lakewood (Washington Furnace), on Bamber Lake (Ferrago Forge) and on

the headwaters of Cedar Creek (Dover Forge).

At first the iron works depended on local bog ore, but later ships brought in iron ore from the Fishkill region on the Hudson River. Butcher's Forge made water pipe for New York City and mule teams hauled quantities of pig iron across state from Dover Forge to Philadelphia. Ferrago Forge turned out bar iron in what authorities called "one of the best planned and built forges in New Jersey."

Ocean's iron works disappeared by Civil War time. Possibly the most important contribution of the forges was the fact that William Torrey Sr. and Joseph W. Brick came seeking fortunes in iron and stayed to bring new life to the pines.

TORREY bought 27,500 acres of woodland surrounding the old Wright Forge in 1841 to make charcoal on a large scale. He built a railroad to Toms River, using wooden rails and

mule-drawn charcoal cars. Years later Torrey and his sons, William and John, stood up to the powerful Camden & Amboy Railroad monopoly and demanded a charter for a railroad across South Jersey. They won the right to start the Raritan Bay & Delaware Railroad in 1856. Completion of the railroad in 1860 helped open the pinelands to outside interests.

Brick, meanwhile, rebuilt the old Washington Furnace in 1833 and saw it thrive before his death in 1847. His family carried on and the area became known as Bricksburg in his honor. In addition, the pretty lake which powered Brick's works was given the name Carasaljo—combining the names of Joseph W. Brick's three daughters, Caroline, Sally and Josephine.

Elsewhere in the pines, John Webb—best known as "Old Peg-Leg John" because of his wooden leg—drained a swamp near Cassville in 1845 and grew cultivated cranberries which netted him \$50 a barrel in Philadelphia (where sailing masters thought cranberries prevented scurvy on long voyages). Webb's success prompted neighbors to engage in cranberry planting of their own.

NEVERTHELESS, despite the goings-on in the pines, life centered on the coast. Actually, fear of the sea haunted coastal folk as much as love of the surf lured them. The treacherous shoals of Barnegat pounded ships to pieces and flung their cargoes and their dead and dying passengers on the sands. Hulks of ships destroyed by the moody ocean littered the beaches. Truly the coast from Point Pleasant to Little Egg Harbor merited its title, "Graveyard of the Atlantic."

Congress took official notice in 1834 by building the original Barnegat lighthouse. Sullenly the ocean fought back, licking away at the sands until the beacon toppled into Barnegat Inlet in 1856. Immediately Congress appropriated \$60,000 for a new light, built in 1857 and 1858 under the direction of Lt. George Gordon Meade, U. S. Army engineer who later won fame as Gen. Meade at the Battle of Gettysburg. F. Hopkinson Smith, author and

OCEAN COUNTY



Boat basin at Point Pleasant, a gateway to the inland waterway.

playwright, worked on the lighthouse as an engineer—and in his spare time started to write a seaside classic, "The Tides of Barnegat."

The cruelty of the ocean struck young Dr. William A. Newell with full force during a visit to Long Beach in 1839. Out on the beach at the height of a Summer storm, young Dr. Newell watched the Austrian brig Perasto break up on a sand bar only 300 yards from shore. His horror mounted as, one by one, the captain and crew of the Perasto drowned in the surf, with watchers powerless to help.

"If only a rope could be tossed that 300 yards," Dr. Newell thought. As he mourned the dead he conceived the idea of tossing a line to stricken ships by a shortened blunderbuss. Elected to Congress in 1846, Dr. Newell offered a resolution in 1848 which laid the foundation of the United States Lifesaving Service, forerunner of the present U. S. Coast Guard rescue stations. The sum of \$10,000 was appropriated to provide surfboats and rope-tossing equipment along the Jersey coast, and, fittingly enough, the coun-

try's first two lifesaving stations were built in Ocean County.

At about the same time Joseph Francis of Toms River, noted boat builder, also sought means to snatch victims from the sea. In 1843 he built the first corrugated metal life boat and a year later invented the life car. The life car and Newell's idea of a rope fired from a gun merged on December 25, 1849, at Chadwick's on Squan Beach, where the Scottish barque Ayrshire struck a sand bar after she floundered in a blinding snowstorm.

John Maxen used Newell's system to fire a life line over the barque and Joseph Francis's life car brought all 201 passengers safely ashore. Maxen, first man ever to throw a life line over a helpless vessel, received a gold medal. Congress honored Francis by striking a medal in his honor—said to be the most massive gold medal ever awarded by that body.

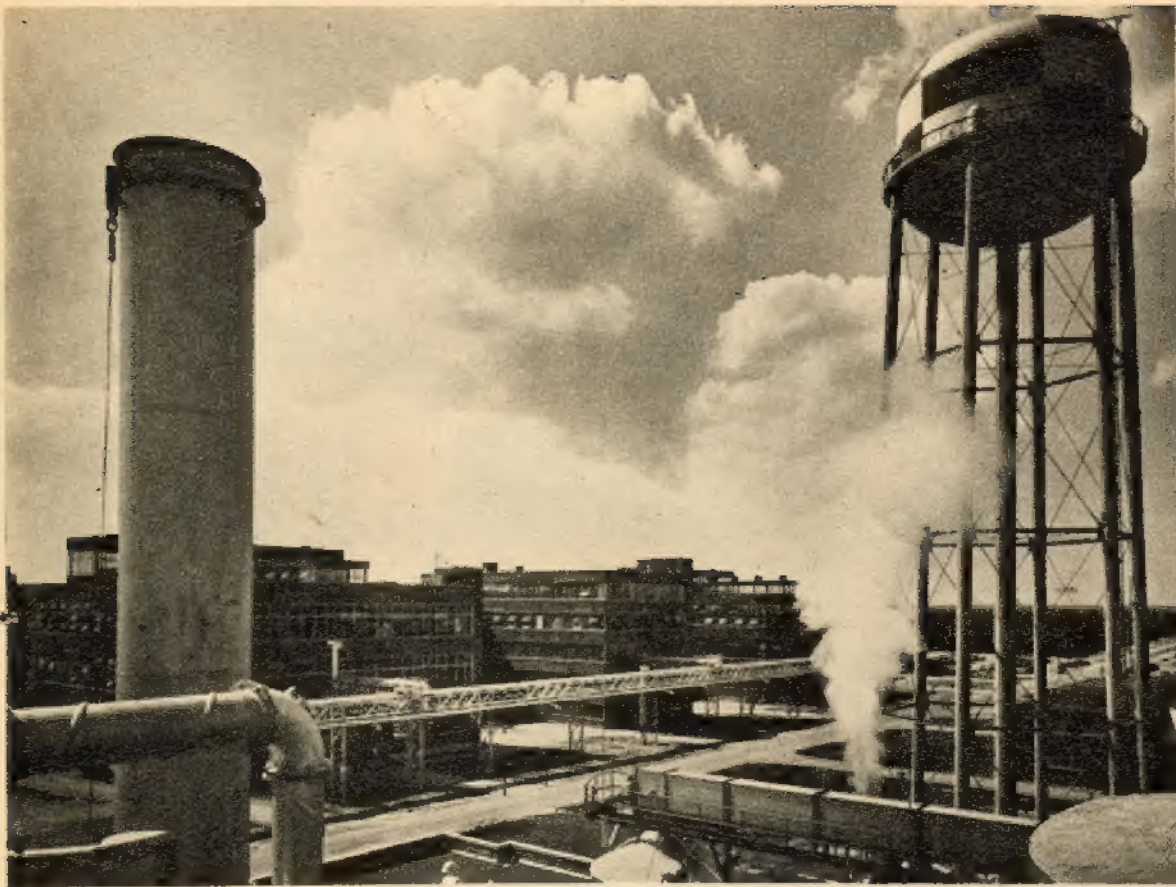
So, with thoughts of gallantry at sea fresh in their minds the county's founding fathers chose "Ocean" for

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The beach at Seaside Heights and (below) an inlet at Toms River.





Ciba States, Ltd., \$5,000,000 pharmaceutical plant at Toms River.

OCEAN COUNTY

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their land after it split from Monmouth County in 1850.

OTHER decisions came less quickly. For example, economy-minded freeholders coldly rejected a budget of \$2,000, then settled on \$1,800 as sufficient for Ocean's 10,032 inhabitants. A court house commission chose Hudson County's building as a model—but agreed Ocean's Court House must be "smaller and less ornate." Completion of the building on June 13, 1851, satisfied most (although some grumbled that \$9,956 was a heap of money to spend on a court house).

Despite the sparse population of the new county, Ocean saw one of its sons, Dr. George F. Fort of New Egypt, elected Governor in 1850. Three years later another Ocean gubernatorial candidate, Rev. Joel Haywood, lost by only 3,782 votes, while in 1856 William A. Newell's election as the state's first Republican Governor brought joy to Ocean County (which felt Newell's life-saving activities made him at least an adopted son).

A CRANBERRY craze swept the county in 1863. Every one who had money or could borrow it started growing cranberries. Swamp land became priceless, even pine barrens brought \$100 an acre. The craze killed itself; as soon as the vastly expanded bogs bore fruit cranberry prices collapsed. When cranberry growing settled down to a sane existence, growers formed one of the state's first farmer co-operatives at Bricksburg.

Scores of families came to Bricksburg in 1866 when the Bricksburg Land & Improvement Co. assured them the soil grew fruit trees in profusion. Two New York Stock Exchange brokers bought 19,000 acres of land in Bricksburg in 1879, built the Laurel House, changed the town name to Lakewood—and wisely decided to capitalize on the pine trees rather than apple trees.

Men of wealth followed in search of the healthful pine air; Lakewood assumed prime importance as a Winter health resort. Many estates flowered among the pines, the most noteworthy being those of George Jay Gould and John D. Rockefeller.

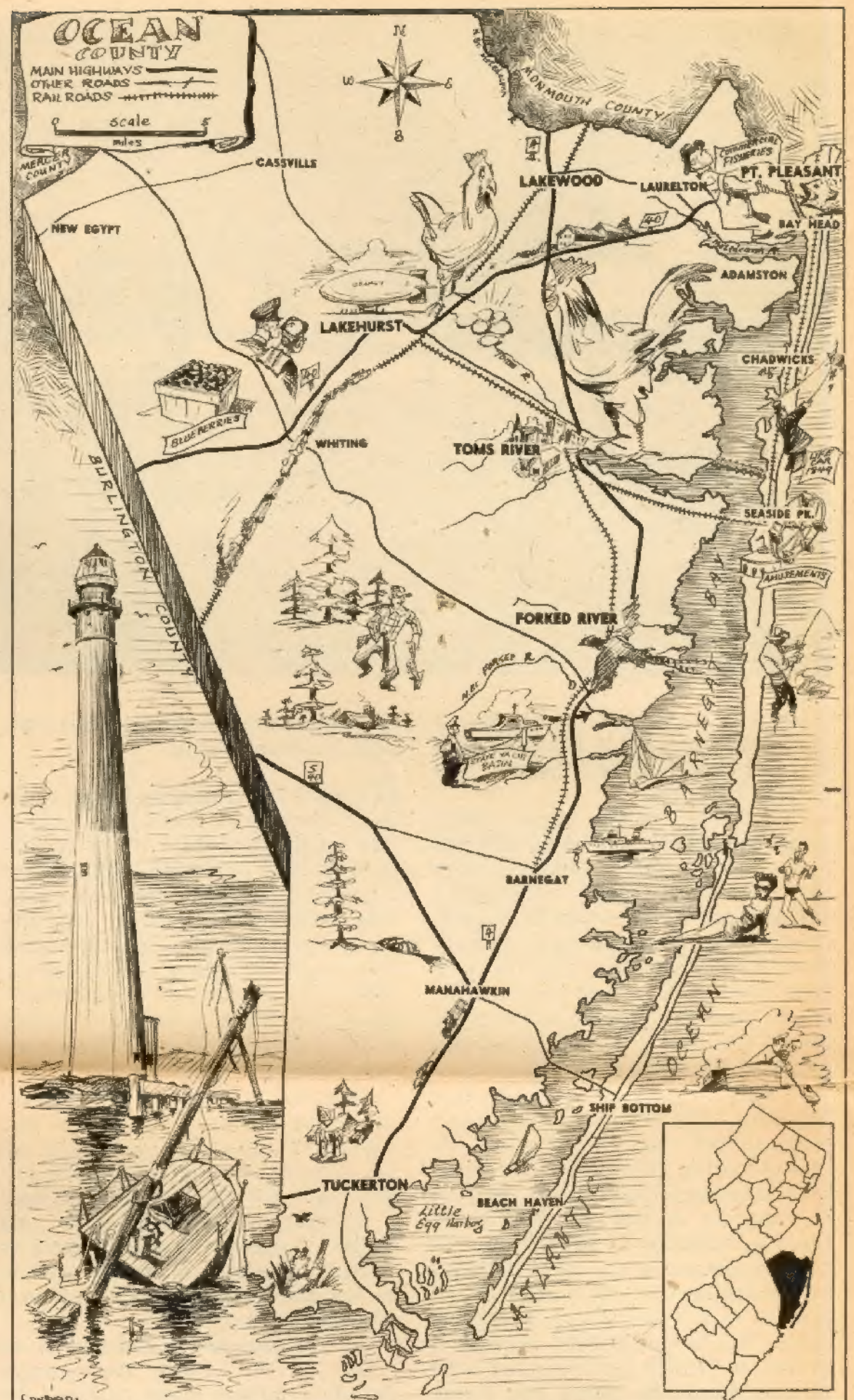
Out along the coast, shipping by boat gave way to shipping by rail in the 1870s. Fishing, clamming and oystering zoomed in economic stature, however, and for years a standing joke in the State Legislature was to call any bill dealing with oysters or clams an "Ocean County bill" (a tacit recognition of the importance of oystering and clamming to the county).

SEASIDE resorts followed the railroads in the 1870s. Point Pleasant Land Co. started selling lots in 1870, the same year a group of Philadelphia Quakers founded Beach Haven. Sea Side Park began as a Baptist religious resort in 1876 and a Methodist camp meeting came to Island Heights in 1878. Bay Head, started in 1883, became very fashionable, luring bathers from as far away as Washington. A railroad on Long Beach in 1885 provided the potential for more resorts.

Ocean County was fully resort-minded by 1900. Seaside towns broke away from larger townships to insure use of taxes to build up local resort facilities. Barnegat Bay became prime hunting and fishing ground for sportsmen, with Forked River, Waretown and Barnegat vying for the trade of gentlemen gunners and anglers.

Staunchly Republican Ocean County received a left-handed gift from the Democratic Legislature in 1891. The Democrats wrote off Ocean County as impossible to convert, but reckoned they had a chance in Burlington. Accordingly, they cut Little Egg Harbor Township (and its Republican votes) away from Burlington and added them to Ocean.

World War I brought in a chemical warfare proving ground to Lakehurst to train troops in handling poi-



Ocean County, with a coastline of 50 miles, has past tied to sea.

son gas. The camp became a Navy lighter-than-air craft base after the war, and the first American-built dirigible, the Shenandoah, made her maiden flight from Lakehurst in 1923. After a series of crashes, the ill-fated dirigibles fell into complete disfavor on May 6, 1937, when the German airship Hindenburg burned in midair at Lakehurst with a loss of 36 lives. The Navy still uses Lakehurst, of course, in its blimp program.

Right after World War I varied groups of immigrants started to arrive in Ocean County, notably the White Russians, who settled near Cassville, and the Scandinavians, who found work in the county's pound fisheries. A writer pointed out in 1923 that the county's "old Anglo-Saxon flavor is disappearing."

Agriculture, which had been confined to the cranberry bogs and the blueberry patches—plus a small area surrounding New Egypt—moved rapidly ahead in the 1920s. By 1925 the

Toms River district had become known as one of the nation's most progressive poultry centers. Today, poultry products mean \$14,000,000 annual income to Ocean County, second only to Monmouth.

More than 400 new chicken farms have been started in the county since 1945. Significantly, Ocean has some of the largest chicken ranches in the state, many of them being more than 3,000 acres in area, but the average size is less than 20 acres. New chicken farms are constantly being started, many of them operated by displaced persons who find in Ocean County both the room and the incentive to live.

NOW past its 100th anniversary (which it tub-thumped for a full year in 1950), Ocean is New Jersey's fastest-growing county, with a population today of about 63,000. That's a big jump since the 1950 figure of 56,622—and even the 1950 figure was an increase



The graceful County Court House, with its Grecian columns, at Toms River and (below) Georgian Court College on grounds of former Gould estate at Lakewood.



of 52 per cent over 1940. County leaders say 10,000 new homes are being built annually—and add that eight out of 10 new homes are being built for year-around living.

Ocean has the lowest industrial employment in the state, but the county is optimistic, mainly because of the \$5,000,000 plant which Ciba States, Ltd., is building on the banks of the Toms River between Lakehurst and Toms River. Nevertheless, 82 per cent of the county is still undeveloped and the feeling persists that Ocean actually has more future than past.

Fishing and clamming are still important sources of income, but when Ocean thinks of its sea today it thinks mainly of resort income (which the county claims is \$150,000,000 annually). Large-scale development has yet to hit much of the coast; Long Beach, for example, still has long stretches of primordial charm. Above all, 10-mile-long Island Beach, just south of Seaside Park, is still betwixt-and-between conversion into a state park.

THERE'S an air of excitement in Ocean County in 1953. People talk hopefully of reclamation of the hundreds of thousands of acres of pine land. The sea still splashes on the sands—usually as a gentle, inviting host; sometimes as a violent reminder of its awesome power. Bones of wrecked schooners no longer litter the beaches, but memories of days when they did linger on.

"Ocean" is every bit as good a name in 1953 as it was in 1850. Today fortunes still follow the sea—and the fact is that a boarding house is worth far more (in dollars only) than a brig or schooner ever was.



The Potter Church at Murray Grove, Lanoka Harbor, birthplace of Universalist Church.



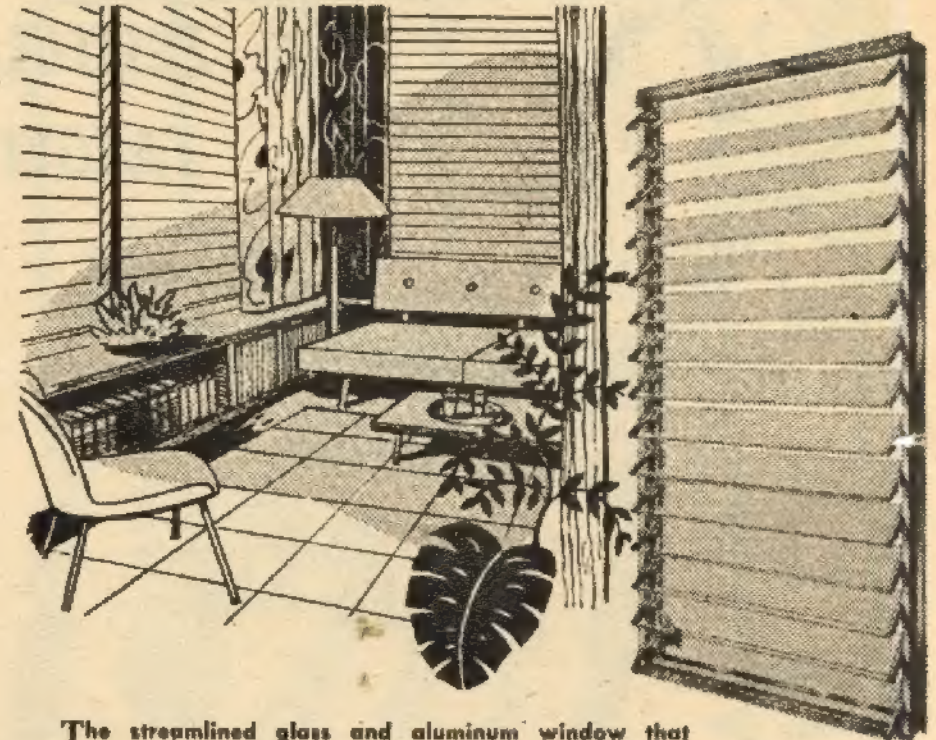
1850 1950

OLD POTTER CHURCH

Built by Thomas Potter in 1760 for the preaching of the gospel of Universal salvation. In 1770 the Rev. John Murray came ashore for help for the stranded Brig Hand-in-Hand. At Potter's request, he preached in this meeting house the first Universalist sermon in America. Scene of annual pilgrimage of New Jersey Methodists.

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